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Newstead's Recollections
of Rev Richard Watson
1838

of Newstead, Autobiography

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J. Watson.

RECOLLECTIONS

OF THE LATE

REV. RICHARD WATSON.

BY THE

REV. ROBERT NEWSTEAD.

MDCCCXXXVIII.

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RECOLLECTIONS,

&c.

My first acquaintance with Mr. Watson commenced on my return from India, in 1824. On arriving in London, in the month of June of that year, I found, to my great satisfaction, my residence fixed at his house, then in Wellington Street, Pentonville. From thence I removed with his family to the house in which he died, in Myddleton Square; and, in the whole, was under his roof for the space of three years.

In the course of this time, I necessarily saw him very frequently, in all the varieties of domestic and social life, as well as in the daily discharge of official duties. For the latter I had the better opportunity, from the circumstance of being honoured to act as the Junior Secretary to the Missions during the year of Mr. Watson's presidency.

On looking over my various letters, received from Mr. Watson, both at home and abroad, during the last ten years, I am more than ever impressed with the incalculable loss our Missions have sustained in his comparatively early removal! The amazing comprehensiveness of his views, as to the Missionary department of our work, was strongly marked in all his communications. He seemed to have an almost intuitive apprehension of what was necessary, and what ought to be done; which was astonishing under the vast variety of business which is connected with that work. The place, the circumstances, the character, almost the contingencies of the station appeared to be present with him; and Missionaries have remarked in my hearing, that their letters of instruction, written by him, as well as the wise counsels previously given, have most surprisingly met their peculiar circumstances, and were almost universally suited to the occasion, and justified in the result. Indeed he was himself a Missionary in spirit: and thus he could, as he did, enter into the

feelings and views of Missionaries ; and even go before them in their enterprises on the field of the world.

At one period of my residence with him, so ardently was his mind exercised upon the blessed prospects of our South African Mission, that he actually used seriously to converse on the delight he should feel in going out himself, to reside for a time at the Cape of Good Hope ; and more than once have I heard him, after expatiating on the blessedness of Missionary work in these regions, seriously put it to his family, whether they would accompany him.

When the Rev. Stephen Kaye was appointed for that quarter of the globe—his original destination having been to Ceylon, —Mr. Watson congratulated him warmly on the appointment, and said, “ Brother Kaye, were I a few years younger, or as young as you are, I would immediately go out as a Missionary, and Southern Africa should be the place of my choice in the work.” He appeared to me to be so perfectly at home in this great work, and so thoroughly acquainted with its varied details, that nothing seemed ever to take him by surprise. He received the intelligence of an event, often, as if he had anticipated it ; and was as immediately prepared with a suitable plan to meet the exigency, as if it had been no unexpected contingency. He went, with perfect calmness, through that which would have occasioned great agitation to ordinary minds, and never was at a loss for some suggestion or counsel suited to the existing occasion ; which, equally comprehensive in its nature, and minute in its details—while it would appeal to all by its simplicity—would generally justify itself to every mind, by the sobriety, the judgment, the wisdom, and the forethought which it displayed. At the Mission-House he was a most regular labourer. I had the privilege of accompanying him nearly every day for twelve months, and never do I remember an instance of his being absent except when unavoidable circumstances prevented his going. He had, of course, always something on hand in such a work, in its literary department especially, to which he was more particularly devoted ; and if no letters called for immediate attention in the regular correspondence of the Missionaries, he would immediately sit down to some unfinished work,

and be closely engaged in this way during the best part of every day.

Mr. Watson was one of the most industrious men I ever knew ; —he appeared ever to act on his own sentiment, that “intellectual uselessness is a sin.”* He was never unemployed. His very relaxations and recreations, if such they might be called, were instructive both to himself and to others. He had a great taste for music, for botany, and for several other of the more tasteful and elegant accomplishments. A walk in a field or garden with him was generally a kind of lecture on some branch of natural philosophy ; and, indeed, he never seemed at home but when gathering or communicating instruction. Often in walking down with him, from his own residence to the Mission-House, has he been silently absorbed all the way on some subject of importance, apparently uninterested in all around him ; and, at other times, exceedingly communicative and interesting. He had a most social mind where he could be quite unreserved and at home ; and many have been the instructive and interesting conversations I have enjoyed with him in these walks, on theological subjects, outlines of sermons, &c. One day, in the course of an exceedingly long walk, I remember his relating to me almost the whole of that fine sermon on Chron. xxix. 14—18 ; and never shall I forget the thrill which was produced by some of its finer passages, upon the congregation at Oldham Street, in Manchester, where it was delivered soon after its composition. One of the most delightful journeys I ever took, was in company with Mr. Watson, to the Leeds Conference of 1824. We were to take the Northampton and Nottingham Missionary Meetings in our way. The weather was charming, and gave a fine elevation to the spirits. Our conversation turned principally on the work of Missions, and the subject of preaching ; and during a considerable part of one stage, over a lovely country, he was engaged in giving me a beautiful outline of a discourse on 1 John iii. 1—3. It appeared to have been quite new to his contemplation ; for he introduced it by saying, “What should we say in illustration of a passage like this ?” or words to that

* Introduction to Scougal’s Works.

effect: and beautifully indeed did it illustrate the power of his creative imagination. I remember that, among other fine thoughts suggested by him on that portion of the passage, *It doth not yet appear what we shall be*,—he said, “You do not, for instance, see what shall be in the yet undeveloped powers of an intellectual human being, from some sparks of intellect which might appear in early life. It did not appear what Milton, or Newton, or Locke, would be while yet they were in infancy. We,” he added, “can see all this beautiful landscape which is around us, more immediately; but it doth not yet appear what is beyond us in the distance. We may infer that it is a continuation of the same beautiful scenery; but it is as yet hidden in the haze of the distant obscurity; *it doth not yet appear*. So when the sun,” he continued, “arises in the morning, but a faint conception could be formed from the first streaks upon the clouds, what should be the flood of glory which he would pour upon the world by his full meridian beams.” And thus delightfully would he pour forth instruction to those with whom he conversed. It was impossible to be in his company long and not be instructed as well as delighted. It seems as if, when I recollect these interesting scenes and conversations, I could only with great difficulty bring myself to the sad reality that those lips of eloquence are now for ever silent in death. He very carefully redeemed the time, as if aware of the brief space allotted to him. When at home, I have known him very often, after returning from the sometimes very laborious occupations of the Mission-House, immediately after dinner, go up into his study, and at the next meal bring down several sheets of his “*Institutes*,” or of some other work he had in hand, composed and written in the interval, correcting and amending them as he sat at meat. His great powers of abstraction enabled him to go undisturbedly on with the most important work, while others were conversing around him on ordinary topics; yet, if at any time a theme was touched which interested him, he would immediately observe upon it, and then resume his work. He generally read at meals, as if parsimonious of every hour and moment, and would be gathering in various information, or

reviewing a book, or drinking deeper into sound theological knowledge, while others were only doing the every-day work of life. He was, indeed, a fine example of the most indefatigable industry in redeeming time to the most useful of purposes.

In the exercises of family devotion, his whole manner, his voice, and deportment, were most impressive and dignified ; principally, as I believe, by reason of his great humility ; for the man who, from that very dignity of deportment, might appear to many who knew him not, stern, or even repulsive, was like a little child at the throne of grace. So deeply humbling and particular were his confessions of sin ; so earnest, so deprecating his appeals to divine mercy, through the blood of sprinkling, that it was impossible not to perceive how deeply he felt what he uttered, and how entire was his trust in the Christian atonement. He appeared to possess the most commanding faith in prayer that I ever observed in any one. He seemed to have ever before him the spirit of his own beautiful observations in a sermon which I heard him preach in Great Queen Street Chapel, in 1826, on Mark xi. 24. "The simple object of faith," he observed, "is to rest on what God has promised—nothing else : not to look at the magnitude or number of our offences, or at the greatness of our depravity, but at the promise of God to pardon : not to contemplate the inveteracy of our hereditary corruption, but, leaving the whole to God, take His promise to His throne of grace ; plead its fulfilment ; trust, believe—His power, His willingness, His love : this trusting faith shall be honoured ;—He can even now save you from all your inbred corruption ; and you may now go in peace and sin no more." He always read the Holy Scriptures on these occasions himself, while he engaged others, alternately with himself, in prayer : and it was a privilege, indeed, to hear him read the sacred oracles. He would, in addition to the most impressive emphasis, frequently stop and give some illustrative comment, either from the stores of his own mind, or from some well-approved writer on the Scriptures.

Mr. Watson possessed a very *noble* mind, greatly independent in itself, and above many of the ordinary motives which

actuate ordinary minds. He could not bear the very appearance of affectation with patience, in any man, and especially in the pulpit: it was sure to meet a severe rebuke, or a sarcastic allusion. Hypocrisy, in all its forms, he detested; and when he came in contact with it, seemed almost a discerner of spirits. His penetrating glance seemed to discover the reality of things, however ingeniously covered over. I have seen an individual tremble in his presence before his hypocrisy had been apparently detected. He was exceedingly generous, and, of consequence, hated meanness in all its forms. He gave with great liberality to the poor; and, in the ordinary intercourse of human life, was sure to be beforehand with others in acts of generous kindness.

I spent three weeks with him at Cheltenham soon after my return from India—both of us being exceedingly unwell and under the same physician. Here I saw his disposition largely exemplified in various ways, and in nothing so much as the pleasure he seemed to derive in giving pleasure to others. He possessed in no ordinary degree that feature of a generous mind, which though, perhaps, less discernible by men in general, is not the least noble of its characteristics,—a remarkable readiness to forgive: or, if he had offended any one, to be reconciled, and at peace with them. I once saw a striking instance of this in a case where, perhaps, too much warmth of expression had been betrayed on both sides, and the individual in question was exceedingly grieved. Mr. W., with a nobility of soul which is not too often seen, himself commenced (coming into the room for the purpose of removing the burden from the mind of the other) the self-denying work of acknowledging that he had drawn too hasty conclusions, and acted too hastily upon them; and appeared himself literally uneasy—a feature of his character I have often observed on other occasions—till he could go away with a good-natured smile upon his countenance, and leave the individual alluded to with the most perfect good understanding.

He took great pleasure in assisting the studies and directing the minds of the young men who were so happy as to be placed with him previously to their proceeding to their Missionary work. Several have acquired the Classical, and some the Oriental languages

under his roof. And indeed, whether from his conversations or advices—his prayers or directions, if any went from under his roof unimproved, it must have been from their own inattention, or want of application. Under his roof, I had myself the happiness of bringing through the press the New Testament and Book of Common Prayer in the Indo-Portuguese; and when I fully calculated on returning again to India, and was furnishing myself with additions to my library, I remember with what kind assiduity he would walk out with me expressly to aid with his judgment my various purchases, and to point out the best editions of Classical and other authors, with which his extensive reading had made him acquainted. I should indeed be ungrateful if I did not acknowledge the great obligations under which I was laid by his kindness and by his wisdom during the whole of my intercourse with him. In many instances his counsels, opinions, and advices were of the utmost importance to me. I am among the many who will have to be endlessly thankful that he ever existed. To the deep spirituality and heavenly unction which characterized his preaching, I bear my willing and grateful testimony; for to no earthly teacher have I been, under God, more indebted than to Mr. Watson. The deep and heart-searching tone of his ministry was calculated at once to abase and to lift up—to humble and to elevate—the soul; and no man appeared to me to possess, like him, the heavenly art of leading up the mind from all low and grovelling conceptions and pursuits, into the immediate presence—so to speak—and enjoyment of God. And for these reasons, I must acknowledge that many of his less magnificent discourses—his week-day sermons—his pastoral lectures—were to me ever the most deeply interesting and profitable. These were always characterized by uncommon simplicity and beauty; there was a touching pathos in these addresses which went immediately to the heart, and you felt you were there less to admire the preacher than to be instructed by him in the history of your own sinfulness, and to be led to the cross of atonement, and edified in the deep things of God.

Mr. Watson exceedingly valued the Liturgy of the Church of England, and appeared highly to enjoy it as a part of our

religious worship. As often as it has fallen to my lot to read prayers for him—which I frequently did on account of his great weakness, I have been edified by observing the deep reverence with which he would enter into that part of our sacred services. He was always accustomed on such occasions reverently to take part with the great congregation in some pew near the pulpit, and to go through the various responses in an audible voice and a most devotional manner, setting, in this conduct, a fine example before the eyes of the indolent and the indifferent; some of whom appear to treat this admirable “form of sound words” as if they could themselves produce a better one.

He had an exquisite taste for poetry, and a sovereign contempt for mere rhyme. No one could relish more than he did either the sublime or the beautiful in poetic composition. With what solemn pathos and beautiful emphasis he was accustomed to give out our own unequalled and spiritual hymns, most persons are aware who ever heard him: and how highly he estimated that admirable volume may be seen in his “Life of Wesley.”* I have often heard him express himself strongly, both in public and in private, on the frequency with which those fine devotional compositions are marred and injured by the injudicious choice of the tunes to which they are often sung. It was his matured opinion that we ought to have a copious selection from the vast mass of very excellent sacred music which exists; done by judicious hands, and sanctioned by the Conference, to the total exclusion of all those light, airy, and fugitive compositions, which not only are at variance with all good taste and feeling, but which, from the incessant thirst for novelty in this department of science, are not allowed to become sufficiently familiar to a congregation, before others are introduced, equally unfit for the purpose; so that very frequently the fine melody of congregational singing is utterly prevented, and the performance confined to the choir!

I do not think that poetic composition formed any part of Mr. Watson’s literary occupation—at least latterly—but he was accustomed not unfrequently to quote, with thrilling emphasis

* Pages 324-5.

some of those lyrical effusions of our best writers which had borne the severe test of his own sensitive and exquisite taste. Among these, Milton's sonnet,

“Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints,” &c.,

was a great favourite ; and often have I heard him repeat with most impressive solemnity those beautiful lines of Dr. Byrom:—

“ O what is death ? 'tis life's last shore,
Where vanities are vain no more ;
Where all pursuits their goal obtain,
And life is all retouched again.”

These, I have heard him remark repeatedly, are among the finest compositions of the kind, in the language. I am yet half inclined to think that I possess a little specimen of his own composition, in the form of some sweet lines which were written by him in my little daughter's Album, at the Liverpool Conference. I do not remember to have seen them any where else, nor can I recognise them as the production of any other writer. At all events, they mark the delicate taste of our lamented friend, and I therefore transcribe them.

“ Region of life and light,
Land of the good, whose earthly toils are o'er!
Nor frost nor heat may blight,
Thy vernal beauty, fertile shore
Yielding thy blessed fruits for evermore !

There, without crook or sling,
Walks the good Shepherd—
And, to sweet pastures led,
His own lov'd flock beneath his eye are fed.

O that my soul may know,
Beloved ! where thou liest at noon of day,
And from this place of woe,
Released, should take its way
To mingle with thy flock, and never stray.”

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